

(c) by when these electrification projects would be taken in hand and completed?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF POWER (SHRIMATI JAYAWANTI MEHTA): (a) Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) in its meeting held on 23.3.2000 constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM) under the Chairmanship of Dy. Chairman, Planning Commission to review the existing schemes relating to electrification of tribal villages, dalit bastis and benefiting other weaker sections and suggest modifications for accelerating the pace of rural electrification. Besides, the Group of Ministers (GoM) would also consider the general review of future role of manner of operation of Rural electrification Corporation and its sources of funding.

(b) and (c) Two meetings of the GoM were held on 8th January and 9th February, 2001. The recommendations of the Group of Ministers are being finalized.

Effect of providing electricity either free or at subsidised rates to farmers in the country

2823. SHRI K. KALAVENKATA RAO: Will the Minister of POWER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to a write up in the 'Statesman' of 8th January, 2001 wherein it is stated that State Electricity Boards have been rendered bankrupt by providing electricity either free or at subsidised rate to farmers almost all over the country;

(b) if so, whether Government has taken steps to check large scale thefts and slippages of electricity in transmission and distribution in the country; and

(c) whether any action has been taken against persons working in NTPC and NHPC found to be lax in performing their duty?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF POWER (SHRIMATI JAYAWANTI MEHTA): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The main reasons for losses of State Electricity Boards (SEBs) are

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including pilferage and theft of power, high transmission and distribution losses, low realisation and non-viable tariff structure leading to an increasing gap between the cost of supply and realisation per unit. The Conference of Chief Ministers/Power Ministers' held on 3.3.2001 resolved that there is a need to speed up implementation of Power Sector Reforms. The conference *inter alia* resolved that:

(i) Energy audit at all 11 KV feeders within next 6 months and accountability to be fixed at the local level. (ii) Full metering of all consumers by December, 2001. (iii) Launch of effective programmes for identifying and elimination of power thefts in next two years. (iv) Current operations in distribution would need to reach break even in two years and achieve positive returns thereafter. (c) NTPC and NHPC are not in the business of transmission and distribution of power. Therefore, the question of taking action against the employees of the NTPC & NHPC does not arise.

Proposal to Increase unit cost under watershed development programme

2824. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of RURAL DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government had received any proposal from the Government of Andhra Pradesh to increase the unit cost under watershed development programme;
- (b) if so, the details thereof; and
- (c) the action taken by Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT [DR. (SHRIMATI) RITA VERMA] : (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Government of Andhra Pradesh had submitted a proposal to this Department to increase the unit cost under